Building Community Through Archaeology

A METHOD FOR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN ARCHAEOLOGY ON THE NORTHWEST COAST

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What is Community Archaeology?

- Simply put, the involvement of a community of non-archaeologists in archaeological research

- A framework for archaeology in which members of an outside community have an active role in the planning, execution and management of archaeological research

- Based upon the idea that "it is no longer acceptable for archaeologists to reap the intellectual benefits of another society's heritage without providing that society with the opportunity to benefit equally from the endeavour" (Moser et al. 2002:221)

Why involve indigenous communities directly in research?

- ## For Archaeologists

  - Scientific benefits: Check data against independent data source of oral records

  - Practical benefits: Research process and conclusions relevant to people outside the academic archaeology community

  - Ethical benefits: Research that embodies cultural relativism i.e. values information that comes from multiple cultural perspectives

  - Ethical benefits: Promotes proper research conduct by all parties involved

  - Personal benefits: Build relationships with other people who care about cultural resources and their disposition

Why involve indigenous communities directly in research?

- **For Native communities**
  - Practical benefits: Demonstrate cultural continuity and similar stipulations used by governments to make decisions concerning Native peoples and cultural resources (Grier and Shaver 2008)
  - Personal and practical benefits: Enhanced ability to document and preserve this aspect of cultural heritage which has traditionally been controlled by non-Natives
  - Personal benefits: Opportunities for Native peoples who are not affiliated with tribal archaeology programs to be a part of the investigation and management of cultural resources

Project Background

- Research on bone and antler pendants from a 4,500 year old site in Ferndale, WA yielded little information about their use and style

- Why not look to a different kind of expert on the past in the area?

- Why not utilize oral records as another source of data in the lab?

- Wrote proposal with Dr. Stacy Rasmus for a project that would make it possible for Lummi Nation to be partners in archaeological research at Western

Oral records as data source in archaeology

- Using oral records as historical texts, comparing them directly to archaeological data
  - There are those who believe these two sources are fundamentally incompatible (Mason 2006)
  - Other research has shown that it is possible to approach oral records as historical texts (Martindale and Marsden 2003)
  - Only in a later stage of this relationship will we be able to see how Lummi oral records and local archaeological knowledge relate

Background on Lummi-WWU Relations

- Educational environment at Western has in many ways been uninviting to Lummi people (Marker 2000)
- Semiahmoo burial recovery
    - Continued effort by Dr. Sarah Campbell and Dr. Joan Stevenson to lend a hand to Lummi Nation
- Native faculty and students in the Department of Anthropology, many coming from Northwest Indian College

Basic Project Plan

- Project lead (K.E.) collaborates with tribal liaison (S.R.) to submit IRB (WWU, NWIC) and gain appropriate approvals
- Apply for funding
- Work with Lummi Nation to come up with a detailed project plan
- A few students visit Little Bear Creek elder home for the first time
- Invite tribal members to visit archaeology lab regularly
- Use artifacts as discussion prompts
- Approval of any poster, presentation, project using information learned from Lummi tribal members will be sought before it is made available to the public

Before making contact

- **Working together to develop a detailed project plan**
  - Got a "point person" within the community to help guide the project and provide an alternative perspective; in this project, Dr. Stacy Rasmus offered her expertise in anthropological research as well as her experience as a member of the Lummi Nation

  - Working with Dr. Rasmus, Dr. Campbell, THPC, Northwest Indian College and Culture Commission to develop the project so that it that takes into account current interests of both participant communities

For this project…

- **Selected goals of Western archaeologists**
  - Continue to study the Ferndale site collection to understand it to the greatest degree possible
  - Gather information about the archaeological history of Whatcom County from diverse sources

- **Selected goals of Lummi tribal members**
  - Support Elders and enable them to be as active in the community as possible
  - Preserve the cultural heritage of Lummi Nation including archaeological sites and oral records

Important Considerations

- Pursue true research goals and demonstrate your ability to reach them

- Suggest concrete ways for the project to benefit the community you want to work with

- Focus on the human aspect throughout the process; this isn't just research, people are sharing precious life experience and knowledge

- Be patient!

Conclusion

"Community archaeology can be extremely time consuming, deeply frustrating, humbling and challenging in unanticipated ways – but it is also rewarding in ways that transcend narrow academic accolades." (Marshall 2002:218)

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